

November 23, 2014
Christ the King

"Our Shepherd King Wants Us to Be Dependant on Him"

EZEKIEL 34:11-16,23,24

For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

During my student days I spent one summer working in Glacier National. My job was driving a red tour bus through the park. It was not uncommon to see wild sheep and wild goats as we were going over the famous "Going to the Sun" highway. These creatures were nothing like the domestic sheep that you see in large numbers on farms and ranches. They do not need a shepherd to care for them. When temperatures drop below zero their thick hair and wool keep them warm. Their ability to jump up on the steep cliffs allows them to escape the mountain lions, grizzly bears, wolves and coyotes. They know where to find their food and water.

How different is the domestic sheep. They are not good at jumping up steep cliffs or running on narrow mountain paths to escape wild animals. They are not capable of finding their own food and water. They certainly do not have the ability to defend themselves. Yet domestic sheep thrive in large numbers because they are dependent on a shepherd to care for them. The shepherd protects them and leads them to green pastures and cool waters.

What does the Lord your God want to happen in your life more than anything else? When it comes to being saved and spared from eternal death and punishment, he wants you to be dependent on him and his love for you rather than thinking you can make it on your own. On this Christ the King Sunday we want to focus our attention on this important truth: **"Our Shepherd King Wants Us Dependent on Him."**

He gathers the scattered sheep

How can you not be deeply touched by the love your Shepherd King has for you when hear

how he searches for the lost sheep and brings them home. "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness." Can you not see determination on the face of your Shepherd as he says, "I will search for my sheep... I will look after them...I will rescue them..?"

Why were the sheep scattered? The Lord tells us in the first part of this chapter, "Woe to the shepherds who only take care of themselves! You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost." The prophets and kings and priests of Israel were leading God's people to worship false gods. What about today? If the pastors don't feed their people from the Bible, and if parents don't lead their children into the pastures of God's Word, and if people are not personally reading God's Word, they risk becoming scattered and lost and vulnerable to the attacks of Satan.

When we read these words about the Lord seeking his lost sheep, we think of Jesus going after the lost and scattered people of his day. We think of him standing beneath a sycamore tree and looking up to a man named Zacchaeus who was deeply troubled by all the lies and stealing he had done in his life. See the joy on Jesus' face and hear the joy in his voice as he says, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Jesus brought him the forgiveness of his sins. He summed up his purpose for coming into the world with these words, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."

People are lost without Jesus. If a sheep is scattered it will not survive on its own. It cries out for help with plaintive calls that echo through the canyons and invite the wild animals to an easy meal. The Lord says he will rescue his sheep from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. What darkness comes over us when we fully realize the full depth of depravity that exists within our hearts. How hopeless our condition is as we take seriously the words of Isaiah 53:6, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." We cannot make it back on our own. We are no match for Satan and his evil angels.

What hope we have in Jesus our Shepherd. Look at Jesus as he finishes praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples are sleeping while Jesus is praying. He wakes up his disciples and says to them, "Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" Jesus has determination written all over his face as he speaks these words. He wants to give his life for us at the cross. He wants to fulfill his words spoken to his disciples, "I am the good Shepherd, I give my life for the sheep." One of the hymns has these words about Jesus being our Shepherd who gives his life for us. "What punishment so strange suffered yonder. The Shepherd dies for sheep that love to wander."

In the 23rd Psalm we speak very personally about the Lord as our shepherd with these words, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." Why are you able to say these words? It is not because you were clever enough to find your way back into the arms of the Shepherd on your own, No he found you when you were scattered. He found you when you were without God without hope as it says in Ephesians 2. We were born with a fierce independence that made us think we could make it on our own or that we did not need

the help of our Shepherd. Our Shepherd came to us and spoke to us and changed us to become totally dependent on him.

On this Christ the King Sunday we think of all the people our Shepherd strategically placed in our lives to bring us back to him. I think of my life. My Shepherd King gave me Christian parents who took me to worship on Sunday. He provided me with pastors who deepened my understanding of God's Word. He showed me my grandmother reading her Bible at night and helped me to read the Bible for the first time in my life. The Shepherd has allowed me to see people grow in the Word and be strengthened in their faith in such a way that they brought new insights into God's love for them into my life. The story of my life and yours is the Shepherd King who says, "I will, I will, I will rescue them when they are scattered."

He cares for the gathered sheep

And what does the Shepherd King do for the sheep that he has gathered around him. He continues to lead them up into places where they can continue to grow in understanding his love for them. "The Lord God says, "I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel." When the summer heat dries up the grasses in the lowlands, the Shepherd King takes his sheep into the mountain valleys where the grass is green and rich. He allows the sheep to graze and then lie down beside the cool waters. He gathers his people around him so they can be nourished on the love he has for them.

Jesus is your King of kings and Lord of lords. As your Shepherd Jesus already has planned out for your life the places and times where he will let you see aspects and blessings of his love for you that will take your breath away. During the difficult days that are ahead he will take you into his Word and show you once again how much he loves you and cares for you. He has already planned for the times when he will give you his body and blood in the special meal he has for you. He has already planned for those times when he will remind you of the blessings of your Baptism. He already knows the promises he will bring into your life to assure you of his continual support and strength for you.

Our Shepherd King helps us when we are beaten up by our problems in life or our own weaknesses. He knows exactly how to bind up our wounds, especially when Satan gives us a nasty beating. He says, "I will bind up the injured and the weak...I will shepherd the flock with justice." Among the farm animals there are always those who butt others with their heads or peck others with the beaks or jab with their horns. The Shepherd promises to protect us and keep us. He says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

Our Shepherd is a great King, a King above all kings. . "I will place over them, one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken." At the time these words were written King David was dead for over four hundred years.

Is the Lord saying he would have King David come back to life again and restore Israel to its glory days of the past? No this is a reference to Jesus. Jesus was born from the line of David. He called himself David's greater Son. He is "the prince among them." Literally the Hebrews says that he will be exalted and lifted up.

Because Jesus is "prince among them" and highly exalted at the right hand of God he is in a position to monitor and care for all the sheep he has gathered into his church. Ephesians says, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church." In New South Wales, Australia, cutting-edge technologies are being applied to the age-old craft of shepherding. Ranchers attach tiny GPS transponders to the ears of sheep and a computer monitor tracks their movement. Does Jesus your King need a GPS transponder to track your moments? Not he is the exalted one. Not a hair can fall to the ground without our heavenly Father or Jesus knowing about it. Isaiah 40 is not exaggerating when it says, "He gathers the lambs and carries them close to his heart." Listen carefully with your ears of faith and you will hear the beating heart of your Shepherd King. That's how close he is to you. Your Shepherd King has made you totally dependent on him. That is a wonderful place to be no matter what challenges life brings you again this week. Amen.